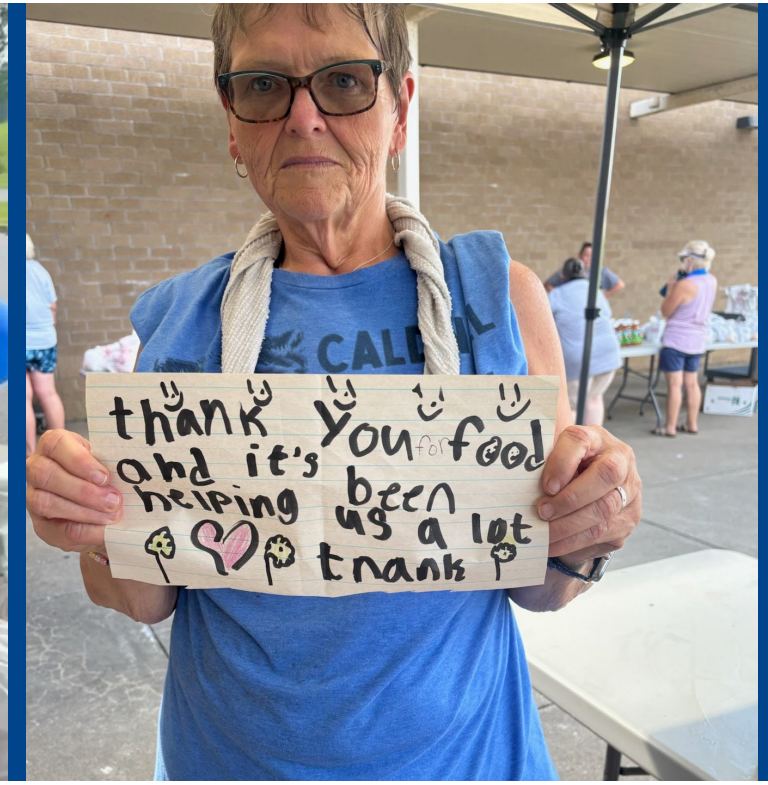




Caldwell County Case Study

In summer 2024, Caldwell County, Kentucky had not had a federally-funded Summer Food Service Program in at least a decade. With a 23% child food insecurity rate in the county, families and their students would struggle without access to school meals during the summer months. At the start of summer 2025, Food Service Director Aaron McClung thought he and his team would serve around 300 students a week with his new rural non-congregate summer meals program. But by July, they were serving 800 students per week, offering seven days' worth of breakfast and lunch at a time - that's over 11,000 meals a week!

About Caldwell County

When Aaron McClung and his food service team decided to launch their summer meals program, support came from across the district and broader school nutrition community. He sought advice from and worked with several neighboring county School Nutrition Directors to learn more about how their summer meals operations worked and the steps needed to get the program up and running. Within the district, Aaron hired many of his existing food service staff for preparation of the meal bags and weekly distribution, with additional help coming from volunteers, including a district bus driver. Administrative support from the district's FRYSCs, Assistant Superintendent, Superintendent, Director of Pupil Personnel, Guidance Counselor, and Secretary - starting on the first day of service and continuing throughout the summer.

Planning & Site Selection

In a rural community like Caldwell County, drive-through meal pickup was the best option. Instead of coming to town each day to eat, a once weekly pick-up of SUN Meals to Go was more like “an extra stop to the grocery store.” Their team also picked a convenient time for families, in an afternoon window, which covered shift changes at the local factory. In the future, Aaron is considering additional ways to expand their program to broaden the reach for families with transportation and other barriers limiting them from participating in the program as well.

Beyond Summer Meals

Aaron is also using his carry-over budget, boosted by rural non-congregate, to update aging kitchen equipment and serve even higher-quality foods. He is also beginning discussions with principals in his district to explore launching a Breakfast After the Bell program. “It’s just made my whole department better. I don’t have to worry about bottom lines as much when I know I have this money coming through in the summer.”

BY THE NUMBERS

NEED

1 in 5

KIDS IN CALDWELL COUNTY
FACES HUNGER

1,694

KIDS RECEIVING FREE OR
REDUCED-PRICE SCHOOL
MEALS IN CALDWELL COUNTY

23%

CALDWELL COUNTY CHILD
FOOD INSECURITY RATE

102,384

MEALS SERVED TO CHILDREN
THIS SUMMER

11,000

NON-CONGREGATE SUMMER
MEALS SERVED PER WEEK

800

CHILDREN FED BY
CALDWELL COUNTY'S
SUMMER MEAL SITE PER
WEEK

IMPACT
CALDWELL

Staffing is Key

Staffing structure is a challenge for my summer meal sponsors, and often finding the right people to take on this challenge is detrimental to the success of a district's program. For Aaron, that was Vickie Purcell, cafeteria manager at Caldwell County Elementary School, had taken summer jobs at other sponsors in neighboring counties and brought her knowledge and enthusiasm to Caldwell County's program. Her drive and passion to get their children fed this summer made all the difference in combatting challenges and finding solutions throughout this first year of implementation.

Communication Strategies

Aaron and his team knew that communicating about this new program would need to be robust to reach their families. Their team utilized Facebook, parent communication apps, and radio to promote the program and spread the word. Community members also shared information about the program, including Facebook Lives on pick-up days, showing how the process worked and what food families could receive. They served lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, easy to microwave items, and different fruit juices each week. Next summer, Aaron hopes to expand and improve awareness of the program, and continue to make sure kids in his community have the fuel they need to learn and play all year long.



“Pick people to run it who are bought-in. People who are passionate about feeding kids, doing the work, and getting organized. And just let them run with it.”

